

Weed Information Sheet:



white snakeroot

Ageratina altissima

Identification:

Asteraceae (Aster Family)

Common Perennial forb

Height: 30'-60" **Width:** 12-18"

Leaf Arrangement: opposite

Flower: White

Blooms: Mid-summer to Early fall **Fruit:** Fluffy

Fall Color:

White snakeroot is a herbaceous perennial growing to 2-4" tall. Leaves are arranged opposite each other on the stem, with leaf stalks about 1/3 as long as the leaf blade. The leaves themselves are teardrop shaped, nearly as wide as they are long, with serrated margins. Tiny, white, 5-petaled flowers cluster into large umbels at the top of each stalk and bloom in late-summer and fall. Though the foliage is usually a typical green color, it can turn yellowish-green during the blooming period, especially if it is growing in full-sun or dry conditions.

White snakeroot could be confused with some of its relatives the bonesets (*Eupatorium* spp.), which are more desirable native species. All of the bonesets have narrower leaves, which are more than 3x longer than they are wide. Also, bonesets have short leaf-stalks or lack leaf stalks entirely. Most of the bonesets prefer sunnier environments.





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AKA: *Eupatorium rugosum*

Description & Impact:

White snakeroot is a member of the Aster family and is native throughout the eastern U.S. It prefers degraded woodland and riparian areas in partial sun to light shade. It is an excellent pollinator plant, attracting a variety of bees and butterflies to its late-summer blooming white flowers which are arranged in flat-topped clusters.

All parts of white snakeroot contains the toxin trematol which can cause illness or death in livestock from eating large amounts of the plant or consuming smaller amounts over a longer period of time. The toxin can be transferred to humans by consuming milk from livestock that graze on the plant. In the early 1800's, "milk sickness" resulted in the death of thousands of European settlers, most notably, Abraham Lincoln's mother in 1818.

Most cattle tend to avoid this species, and as a result, in woodlands that have been grazed for a long time, white snakeroot can be overly-abundant. It also responds positively to fire, and can be prolific in the years following a prescribed burn. White snakeroot can spread freely by seeds and rhizomes. Therefore, it may be advisable to control this native plant in cases where its abundance is monopolizing growing space preventing the establishment of a more diverse assemblage of native woodland plants.

Control Methods:

Digging: Control of white snakeroot may be challenging since it is often abundant and mixed in with more desirable natives. For small areas, hand pulling when the soil is moist works fairly well since the plants have a weak root system. Have a digging tool such as a hori-hori handy to be sure you get the entire root crown.

Mowing: For larger populations, mowing or cutting the plants to the ground during flowering will weaken the plants and reduce seed production. Another time to mow would be when the plants reach about 10-12" tall in the spring. Multiple cuttings per season may be needed to prevent flowering all together.

Herbicides: Careful spot-applications of glyphosate (Roundup®, etc.) or triclo-pyr (Garlon®, etc.) are the easiest and most effective means of control. Triclopyr is a broadleaf-specific herbicide and won't harm grasses or sedges. Be carefully not to 'overspray' and harm neighboring, desirable plants. This is best done early in the growing season while the plants are small and well-spaced apart from other plants. A 'leaf spritz' application of triclopyr in oil, applying a few drops to the top of the plant is effective and avoids colateral damage to neighboring plants.

Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply according to the instruction on the product label.

Revegetation Recommendations: Wild geranium (*Geranium maculatum*), wild columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*), Jacob's ladder (*Polemonium reptans*), solomon's seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*), stary false solomon's seal (*Smilacina stellata*) and golden alexander (*Zizia aurea*) are all attractive species that can be planted in shady conditions.

Citations: